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Vendor Support vs. Third-Party Support: A Comparison and Decision Guide



A practical guide to help IT and business leaders compare vendor support with third-party support, evaluate strategic fit and make a more informed support decision.

Enterprise software support is no longer just a maintenance decision — it's a business strategy.

As vendor costs rise, upgrade pressure increases and IT teams are asked to fund innovation with limited resources, many organizations are rethinking whether traditional vendor support gives them the flexibility, control and value they need. This guide compares vendor support with third-party support, helping IT and business leaders evaluate key differences, assess strategic fit and identify the model best aligned to their operational, financial and innovation priorities.

What exactly is third-party support?

Third-party support is an alternative to software vendor support for enterprise applications, databases and infrastructure. With this option, organizations are no longer reliant on the software publisher for ongoing support and maintenance; instead, they partner with an independent provider that supports their existing environment.

Unlike traditional vendor support, third-party support is designed to help organizations maximize the value of the systems they already own. Existing releases can remain stable and compliant without upgrades or migrations, and support often extends to customized environments. For organizations running business-critical systems, independent support provides another option for maintaining, operating and evolving enterprise software — and the market has validated its value.

68%

of organizations believe autonomy in deciding whether and when to upgrade enterprise software is very or extremely important

– IDC research

An average savings of

75%

on total software maintenance costs can be achieved by replacing vendor support with third-party support[1]

– Valoir research

1) Based on a study of 200 combined SAP and Oracle clients supported by Rimini Street

In short, third-party support is a reliable, cost-saving alternative to vendor support. But more than that, it's a strategic enabler of better business outcomes.



How does third-party support differ from vendor support?

Though both options provide enterprise software support, they're built around different objectives and operating models.

	VENDOR SUPPORT	THIRD-PARTY SUPPORT
Primary incentive	Product adoption and lifecycle progression	Service quality and client outcomes
Upgrade requirements	Necessary to continue receiving full support	Existing releases remain supported for years
Customization support	Usually limited or unavailable	Often included as part of support
Access to expertise	Often tiered escalation models	Often direct access to experienced engineers
Roadmap control	Influenced by vendor timelines	Driven by business priorities
Cost model	Annual maintenance tied to licensing	Independent support contract
Security strategy	Mostly patches for known vulnerabilities	Proactive risk mitigation from known and unknown vulnerabilities
Innovation strategy	Frequently centered on upgrades and migrations	Enables innovation around stable core systems
Product coverage	Limited to the vendor's products	Provides support across multiple vendors' products

Third-party support puts power back into the hands of the IT leader by allowing them to:

- Extend, protect and optimize existing systems rather than replace them
- Maximize the ROI of IT investments
- Decouple innovation and modernization from upgrades
- Redirect savings of people, time and money toward higher-value initiatives

Ultimately, independent support is a key part of the transition from vendor-controlled roadmaps to enterprise autonomy. It allows organizations to preserve what's working while gaining the freedom to determine their own priorities.

How to determine if third-party support is a good fit

The following criteria can help leaders assess third-party support as a strategic alternative to vendor maintenance.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

- ☐ **Financial impact**
  Evaluate multiyear TCO, EBITDA and free cash flow effects, along with the ability to convert upgrade-driven spend into predictable operating costs.

- ☐ **Risk, security and compliance**
  Review the provider's security capabilities; coverage for tax, legal and regulatory updates; relevant independent certifications and controls; audit readiness; and ability to support stable, customized systems without introducing unnecessary risk.

- ☐ **Operating model and expertise**
  Determine whether the provider's service delivery model, SLAs, global coverage, automation capabilities and access to experienced engineers align with your availability, governance and accountability requirements.

- ☐ **Support-to-innovation capabilities**
  Consider whether the provider can do more than maintain the current environment by helping you optimize operations, address needs across products and vendors, and introduce innovation around stable core systems without requiring disruptive upgrades.

- ☐ **Provider scale and credibility**
  Validate global coverage; financial stability and transparency; independently verified security and operational practices; proven client results; and the ability to support complex, mission-critical environments at enterprise scale.

Over 1,000 organizations, including 200 of the Fortune 500 and Global 100, rely on Rimini Street for third-party support and services across Oracle, SAP, VMware and other enterprise technologies.

The right support strategy should do more than keep your systems running. It should give you greater control over your roadmap, make better use of your resources and create more freedom to pursue the priorities that move your business forward.

Read the Comprehensive Guide to Independent, Third-Party Support and Services for Enterprise Software to explore your options, or talk with Rimini Street about the support strategy best aligned with your business.

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